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UNCLAS ABU DHABI 05080

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RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 005080

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR S/I, NEA/I AND NEA/ARPI

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SUBJECT: IRAQI OVERSEAS VOTE IN THE UAE

¶1. (U) Summary: Iraqis resident in the GCC countries voted in greater numbers in their country's parliamentary elections hosted by the UAE December 13-15 than in Iraq's January 2005 parliamentary elections. The increase, from 11,409 to 17,967, was due in part to a UAE decision to grant a visa waiver to allow non-UAE resident Iraqis to stay in the UAE for a short stay in order to both register and vote on the same day. In January, non-UAE resident Iraqis were required to register to vote on one day, leave the country, and then return to the UAE several days later to vote. The election, which took place amid tight security and under the supervision of international observers, went smoothly and was positively received by expatriate Iraqi voters. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The overseas portion of the December 13-15 elections for Iraq's National Assembly was a success in the UAE, one of 15 countries outside Iraq that hosted elections. According to Mike Burke of the International Mission for Iraqi Elections, which coordinated the independent election observation, "The UAE stepped up and made it happen. They were a giant help last time and they were a giant help this time," Burke said of the outcome of the election procedures. According to Burke, 17,967 Iraqi expatriates voted over the three days in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, with a heavier count in Dubai. "Charter flights full of Iraqis from Doha and Muscat came here," he added. Burke said the UAE's visa waiver decision was largely responsible for the increase in voter turnout. Unlike the January election for Iraq's parliament, the December election allowed voters to register and vote on the same day. The UAEG encouraged turnout by issuing a visa waiver so that Iraqis from other GCC states could come to the UAE for a short stay in order to vote. Burke surmised that the increase may also have been due to the perception by some Iraqis that the December election was less "rigged"

than the January one.

¶13. (U) Preparations for the overseas Iraqi vote in the UAE took less than three weeks. Election officials, using the experience gleaned from the January 2005 parliamentary election, were able to ensure that the December vote was conducted in a professional manner. At the polling places themselves, the voting layout was consistent with general international standards and the local precinct elections were basically well run. Few voters were turned away for inadequate documentation and there were no noteworthy incidents observed during the three days of monitoring. The only constraint in the election process came from the central election center when a prohibition was issued restricting access by international observers to vote count information. This restriction was eventually rescinded reestablishing transparency for the election.

¶14. (SBU) An Emboff who monitored the election in Abu Dhabi observed that voters proceeded with an air of confidence in a voting environment not unlike a hospital clinic staffed by efficient, trained personnel. Prior to casting their votes in the ballot box, voters had to dip their index fingers in blue ink. Later, some of them proudly waved their ink-stained fingers, a symbol of their desire for a new government for their future. The press carried such photos.

¶15. (U) "Gulf News" reported that Iraqi electoral workers at the election center in Dubai refused to hand over some ballot boxes Friday because they had not been paid by the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI). An IECI official was called in to resolve the impasse and the boxes were handed over safely.

¶16. (U) The UAE's role was significant. Besides allowing visa waivers and furnishing election venues, the UAE provided a thorough security environment, and "international" observers (three Emiratis from the Chamber of Commerce and two from the MFA). In addition to the Emirati observers, five embassies (Czech Republic, including the Chief of Mission for a half-day, the UK, Canada, Italy, and the U.S.), and seven Iraqi expatriates were on hand to monitor the proceedings. (Note: There are approximately 50,000 Iraqi expatriates in the UAE. End note.)

¶17. (U) At the Zayed Sports Complex in Abu Dhabi, there were seven voting precinct "stations" set up along a long hallway in the dressing rooms inside the stadium. At the Global Village complex in Dubai, there were initially 18 voting stations, which were expanded to 20 on Wednesday night and Thursday. The vote was scheduled to run from 0800 to 2000. Dubai extended the voting for a limited number of stations by two hours on Wednesday and Thursday.

¶18. (U) In Abu Dhabi, the security arrangements required each voter to produce identification prior to being allowed entry into the sports complex. The police performed thorough inspections of each vehicle entering the complex, employing mirrors and bomb-sniffing K-9 support. Individual voters were required to have any packages x-rayed and pass through a magnetometer. Specified parking was set aside for all vehicles well away from the stadium. Voters were then required to proceed through a second security inspection and magnetometer screening prior to entering the actual voting area within the stadium.

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